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ABSTRACT

With so much of the student population in the adult learner category, by virtue of age alone, the "mainstream of students" is nearly indeterminable: yet, at many institutions, the "mainstream" of classroom teaching style is not adapted to the adult learner. First, there are the common logistical constraints for adult learners such as time constraints and location of the educational offerings. Logistics aside, the more complex issues pertain to what transpires in those classrooms where adult learners are enrolled. Teacher-centered methods have been ingrained in university faculties from years of traditional education, yet adult learners are often student-centered and creative, needing less teacher-centered and subject-centered directiveness. Speech communication is not exempt from the problem. Although communication curricula inherently should allow opportunities for more student-centered, interactive learning, much teaching is by persons who were processed through a teacher-centered system. Effective teachers must not totally abandon their current teaching style, for some learners might need parts of it. The adult-oriented style, which does include some traditional didacticness, is lacking and needed in many speech communication classrooms. (Three footnotes are included; 15 references are attached.) (KEH)

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A CASE AGAINST MAINSTREAMING ADULT LEARNERS IN SPEECH COMMUNICATION CLASSES

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Adult learners are appearing on college and university campuses in ever-increasing numbers. A 1986 report by the National Center for Education Statistics showed that from 1970 to 1985 the nationwide enrollment of students 25 and older increased by 114%, while the number of those under 25 grew only by about 15%. The Center went on to project that from 1985 to 1990 enrollment of students in each group was expected to increase by 8% (Watkins, 1990, p. A1). That growth in adult learners has had particular impact on urban institutions such as ours at Indiana University, Indianapolis. In Fall, 1990, 10,520 of the 26,241 enrollees were over 25 years of age--that is, 40% (Registrar, 1990). The average age of undergraduates at this institution is 27.2 years.

With so many of our student population in the adult learner category, by virtue of age alone, the "mainstream of students" is nearly indeterminable. Yet, we submit that here, as well as at many other institutions, the "mainstream" of classroom teaching styles is not adapted to the adult learner.

To the extent that traditional classes do not focus on the adult learner, we are against "mainstreaming" adult students into those classes. Our position is <u>not</u> that adult learners and traditional college-age students permanently should be separated. Instead, we argue that the current [no pun intended] mainstream ultimately should be replaced by a new one, i.e. all students essentially would be better off by being taught in a more adult-oriented environment.

One of the most renowned and extensive researchers on adult education, Jerold W. Apps, of the University of Wisconsin, Madison, in a recent interview in the Chronicle of Higher Education, noted that "as he teaches more students and does more research on student learning ..., he is concluding that the best methods for teaching older students are the best methods for teaching everyone" (Watkins, 1990, p. A12). Yet, he noted that those best methods for older students were not being used today. "We need to get all students involved, take advantage of their previous experience ... and use a variety of instructional approaches so they reach everyone." We must design a teaching style to meet the needs of adults while assimilating traditional students as well.

Before considering the more complex issue of teaching style as it relates to our case against mainstreaming, we address the more common logistical concerns for adult learners such as time constraints and location of the educational offerings. While traditional students, especially full-time ones, more easily can attend class on campus at regular hours during weekdays, many adult learners have job commitments during that time, and might work considerable distance from campus. Scheduling becomes a key factor in such instances. The time conflict can be overcome by scheduling evening classes, which for some years has been an accommodation for adult learners, especially at urban campuses. To clear the hurdles of location and time, regular college credit courses have been made available for degree-seeking adults on a

one-evening-per-week basis at high schools, libraries, and business locations.

More recently, the weekend college has been designed so those unable to attend during the week can meet their college credit courses in once-a-week sessions on Saturdays and/or Sundays. In this way, all campus facilities, including the library, can be made available. And, of course, advanced media technology allows interactive learning over distances in multiple settings.

Other innovative nontraditional educational delivery systems have been developed more recently. Slightly over a decade ago, James East, an associate dean and communication professor at IU Indianapolis, founded the Learn and Shop program. In it, courses for adult learners are offered in training rooms of major department stores at five of the large shopping malls in and around the periphery of Indianapolis.[1]

Within the past four years, East has designed a program, Learning Downtown, which primarily features one-hour courses of a skills nature for professionals. The courses meet in downtown business and government buildings for five-week or eight-week segments of the semester.

In contrast with such innovative scheduling arrangements, traditional universities have retained a system mostly of courses with uniform credit hours on campus, all fitting the same sequence of weeks, culminating in a structured four-year undergraduate education. There is nothing particularly magical or sacrosanct about forcing all education into that mold. In

fact, many adult learners in the corporate community are barred from attending traditional classes because, as a Carnegie Report emphasizes, "the corporate calendar differs markedly from the collegiate lockstep" (Eurich, 1985, p. 21).

Partially as a result of such inflexible traditional scheduling, corporations have begun establishing their own educational programs for adults. By 1986, corporate learning had grown to be a $30 billion a year industry, whereas some $94 billion a year was being spent on formal post-secondary education (Carnevale, 1986, p. 18). Noting the operational inadaptability of the "mainstream," Gordon Darkenwald admonished that "educational institutions should anticipate and mitigate logistical problems related to such matters as scheduling and excessive demands on the time of corporate managers" (Darkenwald, 1983, p. 241).

Not all adult students are corporate learners, but a large number are, and it behooves us to consider their scheduling concerns while at the same time retaining academic standards that have a well-rounded education rather than "profit" as the organization's underlying objective. There are many non-accredited independent communication "consultants" who are successfully blanketing industry with offers to teach enrollees "powerful," "intensive" workshops. For lucrative fees, they promise to teach comprehensive one-day seminars that encompass interviewing, conflict resolution, interpersonal skills for motivating and directing employees, and the list goes on. In short, they claim to provide quick-fix injections of

communication skills and knowledge, supposedly equal in effect to large segments of bona fide university curricula (Dick & East, 1989, p. 68). By re-evaluating their traditional schedule patterns, universities could provide more in-depth communication education while concomitantly giving needed quality control and ethical standards.

Indiana University, Indianapolis, has made substantial efforts to extend programs to adult learners through once-a-week courses both on and off campus, in Weekend College, Learn and Shop, and Learning Downtown, in addition to regular weekday evening offerings. In Fall, 1990, the Communication and Theatre Department taught 30% of its sections (60 of 197) and 41% of its courses (19 of 46) at nontraditional times and/or locations. In those nontraditional offerings were 37% of the Department's total enrollees (1,314 of 3,599) (Enrollment Analysis Report, 1990-91). Those schedules and locations indisputably were out of the mainstream, and we are pleased that more and more traditional students are breaking the mold by joining their nontraditional colleagues in such innovative, adaptive contexts.

Logistics notwithstanding, the more complex issues pertain to what transpires in those classrooms that have adult learners enrolled. Here, at the heart of higher education, the teaching behaviors, styles, and processes are receiving even less reform. As Eurich noted in her Carnegie study, "Higher education has done little to learn about teaching and learning. The university's instructional mode has scarcely changed over the past fifty

years. Educational innovations are few and often of only marginal impact" (Eurich, 1985, p. 55).

In recent years there has been considerable discussion of teaching styles and learning styles, particularly as they relate to learner age levels. A key figure in this concern was Malcolm S. Knowles, who popularized the term andragogy ("the education of adults") and contrasted it with pedagogy ("the education of children"). To Knowles, pedagogy was teacher-centered. This meant the teacher maintained "control" and the student was dependent; the teacher issued directives and transmitted information in a one-way, linear fashion while students received it; and external forces motivated the student to learn. In contrast, andragogy was student-centered. This meant the teacher maintained less control, assuming the role of facilitator and resource person while the student was more self-directed; the teacher and student were mutually responsible for the learning; and the student's educational motivation was internal (Knowles, 1970). Knowles' theory has drawn some criticism, especially because of the tendency to dichotomize andragogy and pedagogy, and to make the former appear extremely good and the latter extremely bad. Even Knowles has moderated his position considerably, but academia still can be grateful that he sparked attention concerning teaching and learning styles (Knowles, 1979).

Knowles gave cause for disgruntlement in 1968, when he lamented that university faculties, generally, were guilty of acquiring information about teaching from the way they were

taught as children or from instructors who taught them methods for teaching children rather than university students (Knowles, 1968).

Pre-adult college students will accept traditional styles more readily than adult learners. If that is essentially all those pre-adults are exposed to before they go to graduate school where they focus nearly exclusively on subject-matter without sufficient attention to teaching methods, they might well perpetuate the problem if they become teachers. And we cannot be encouraged by a national survey in the October, 1990, issue of Communication Education, which reported most chairs as saying their Graduate Teaching Assistant training "takes one week or less" (Buerkel-Rothfuss & Gray, 1990, p. 305). This reinforces the practice of having content prevail with little or no method. Why should we assign anyone, let alone adults, to that kind of teaching style roulette?[2]

In her study of "Undergraduates as Adult Communicators," Yvette Schwartz concluded that "Older students presently enrolled as undergraduates in senior colleges face ... participating in classes directed to the learning styles of their younger colleagues.... The student population continues to be the recipient of a pedagogic tradition that commenced with grade school" (Schwartz, 1985, p. 3).

That tradition involves the teacher-centered or directive style which is integral to "pedagogy." A recent study by eight researchers at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, on the educational climate in university skills courses, confirmed that

"Teachers in the courses examined usually delivered content in directive teacher-centered styles, encouraging learners to 'do it like this' or 'practice this on your own for five minutes'." Their findings suggested that "the direct teaching styles that are pervasive throughout traditional education continued to be accepted by these university students" (Ennis, et al., 1989, p. 83).

This does not mean that university teachers do not recognize or at least give lip-service to the fact that adult learners often are student-centered and creative, needing less teacher-centered and subject-centered directiveness. Joan Gorham conducted a study involving 115 adult education instructors at a university, a private four-year college, four two-year community colleges, and three public school adult education programs. In interviews with instructors in her sample, they "spoke often of the responsiveness of adult students and of the quality of interaction in adult classes." (Gorham, 1985, p. 205). Gorham's interaction analysis supported the idea that adult students do interact differently than pre-adult students. Yet, even after stating the differences, their instructors did not adopt styles that were any less directive or more student-centered. Gorham reported that:

> The overall directive teacher behavior was...essentially the same in adult and pre-adult classes; where teachers were overtly directive with pre-adults, they used more subtle, nonverbally restricting behavior with adults. This was not congruent with reported differences in teaching. On the

average, teachers talked 71% of the time in adult classes and 73% of the time in pre-adult classes (Gorham, 1985, p. 205).

So even the adult education instructors used the same teacher-centered methods that had been ingrained in them from years of traditional education, while admitting that adult learners should be interacted with differently.

Speech communication is not exempt from the problem. Although communication curricula inherently should allow opportunities for more student-centered, interactive learning, much teaching is by persons who were processed through a "teacher-centered" system. Basic courses, especially in public speaking, have units on "audience analysis," "identification," "empathy," "interaction," "dialogic communication," "feedback," "rapport," and the list goes on. Yet, the large, multiple-section courses of a skills or "performance" nature, involve individuals preparing and presenting discourses in which they do most or all the talking in order to achieve individualized specific purposes.

The speakers in those courses are taught by professors who were speakers in earlier courses who, in turn were taught by professors who were speakers in ..., etc., etc., ad nauseam. That is not to say that public speaking is not valuable or that no teachers in it are genuinely "audience-oriented" in their classroom methods. In fact, perhaps the discipline has been effective with many traditional learners over the years, and maybe even with some adult learners in some nonperformance-based

communication courses. But, with the influx of adult learners, the cycle of producing teacher-centered instructors will become less and less valuable. Teachers in speech communication, just as the teachers in other disciplines throughout the universities, must develop classroom styles which address the needs of the changing student population.

But the question remains: "If we oppose the current mainstream for nearly all students, and especially for adult learners, then what do we propose? We suggest that college and university communication administrators enact faculty development programs to assist their instructors in developing interaction patterns that are, or can be, less directive and more student-centered. We do not claim to know, at this point, all the specific methods for accomplishing this. Yet, we can begin by practicing what our departments preach about the value of interaction and audience adaptation.

Recently, an adult-oriented model similar to what we have suggested has been proposed by Stewart Tubbs, who teaches adult learners well in the corporate setting. He tells us that "The new paradigm is based on the premise that the 'heroic' form of leadership is obsolete, and that 'developmental' leadership is the more appropriate model of the future" (Tubbs, 1989, p. 5). Tubbs replaces the word "leader" with "TEACHER" and develops categories contrasting the "Teacher-as-Hero Model" with the "Teacher-as-Developer Model." Here are three of the ten sets of entries:

	Teacher-as-Hero Model	Teacher-as-Developer Model
Emphasis	Increasing information, passivity [what can be called directive]	Development of skills, activity, creativity
Locus of Responsibility	Instructor [what can be called teacher-centered]	instructor/students [what can be called called student-centered]
Culture	Formal, parent-child, competitive	Informal, adult-adult, cooperative

We are not saying that effective teachers must totally abandon the current style, for some learners might need parts of it. But the adult-oriented style, which does include some traditional didacticness, is lacking and needed in many of our speech communication classrooms. Until that style pervades, adults should be assigned to the few sections that have instructors who (1) think they recognize the characteristics of an adult-oriented teaching style, (2) are willing to implement those characteristics, and (3) will participate in research that assesses the relationship between such practices and learning outcomes. From this can be generated teaching practices which are grounded in empirical research.[3] This is simply a short-term policy until a transition to adult-oriented teaching style for all sections is achieved. Such a complete transformation will be difficult, but we should strive for it. Said Tubbs: "The only person who likes change is a baby with a wet diaper. Obviously, those of us who have been successful with a didactic teaching style will find many reasons not to change" (Tubbs, 1989, p. 14).

Nevertheless, let us begin.

Footnotes

[1] For a more thorough description of that program and the participation in it by the I.U., Indianapolis, Department of Communication and Theatre, see R. C. Dick & J. R. East (1980) "Learn & Shop: Communication Education in Nontraditional Settings," Communication Education, 29, 291-95.

[2] The problem might be seen as a nearly obsessive concern by higher education for disciplinary research with subordination of teaching. "Faculty development" had gotten much attention during the 1970's. Of all ways to improve themselves, including workshops and courses on teaching, the clear favorite was sabbatical leaves for research along with research grants. Regarding preferences, Burton R. Clark noted: "Faculty expressed concern about their teaching, but saw the problem as one of keeping abreast of one's discipline rather than pedagogy." Details of Clark's analysis are in (1983) The higher education system: Academic organization in cross-national perspective. Berkeley: University of California Press.

[3] Gorham has argued the need for such research in adult education classes (Gorham, 1985).

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